



# CHESHIRE HIGH SCHOOL

525 South Main Street • Cheshire, Connecticut 06410 • 203 / 250-2556 • Fax: 203 / 250-2573

## SCHOOL COUNSELING DEPARTMENT

Michelle B. Catucci, Chairperson  
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Miranda Wheeler

Testimony of Michelle Catucci  
Connecticut School Counselor Association  
*in regards to*

### **H.B. No. 5037- AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.**

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education  
Public Hearing - February 17, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Michelle Catucci and I am the School Counseling Department Chair at Cheshire High School, a Wallingford resident, and the Executive Director of the Connecticut School Counselor. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding HB5037- An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023. **Specifically, I am here today to testify about the importance of school counselors and the need to fund additional school counselors so that every student has access to a school counselor.**

I have been a school counselor in Connecticut for the past 15 years and I can say, without a doubt, that the past 2 years have been the most difficult of my career. Prior to COVID, I was seeing an increase in needs of my students. More reports of self-harm and suicidal ideation, more diagnoses of anxiety and depression, and more students struggling academically. But also more students who were looking for guidance and support in researching and exploring their post-secondary goals, more students wanted to connect with a trusted adult.

Since March 2020 and through the pandemic all of those needs have increased exponentially, yet my time and the resources at my school cannot increase at the same rate. **This means that for the last 2 years I have left work EVERY DAY feeling like I did not do enough.** For every item I check off my to-do list, I add three more. I feel good about the students I get to meet with, but worry that I missed the student that may have needed me the most that day. I sacrifice my lunch, I come in early, I stay late and it still doesn't feel like enough time to meet with all of my students, attend planning meetings, collaborate with my colleagues, return all parent emails and phone calls, coordinate services with outside agencies and organizations, and do the work to align our program to the Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework and offer high quality school counseling services to our entire Cheshire community.



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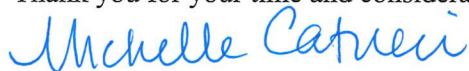
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I proudly work in a district where School Counselors are valued and supported. At the high school our ratios are just under the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) **recommended ratio of no more than 250 students to one school counselor** at 220:1. However, our middle school and elementary schools have much high ratios (over 300:1 at the middle school and over 400:1 at the elementary schools). Even with having at least one school counselor at each school in our district and the collaborative relationship we have with our school psychologists and social workers (as all three roles are essential to supporting students' mental health needs), we are all feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. We all got into this work because we love working with students on their academic, career, and social emotional goals and development, but that job has felt impossible over the last few years.

I cannot imagine working in a district that has even fewer resources than Cheshire, but I know they are out there. **Connecticut ranks 37<sup>th</sup> in the nation for average student to counselor ratio** (the 2018-19 average was 457:1). In some schools in Connecticut, our students are completely denied access to a school counselor for this important developmental work; less than 25% of the elementary schools in our state have school counselors.

**The time is now.** You cannot turn on the news or go on social media without seeing a story about how this pandemic has impacted our children socially and emotionally. Those increasing problems I witnessed prior to COVID have not gone away, they have just kept growing and we see them in our schools every day. New concerns have been introduced – lagging social skills after so much time in isolation and remote learning, dealing with grief and loss, fear of the unknown, lack of empathy from their peers. New opportunities and changes have presented themselves in our state with the job market and career pathways. **School Counselors are uniquely trained to address these needs and skills with a systematic, developmental framework. I would ask that the Appropriations Committee consider appropriating money specifically for School Counseling and the hiring of more School Counselors.** This is important to the future of our children in CT.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Michelle Catucci  
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